

Harbor Seal

Scientific Name: *Phoca vitulina*

Class: Mammalia

Order: Carnivora

Family: Phocidae



Harbor seals have short, round heads with a V-shaped arrangement of the nostrils. The background color is generally brownish or gray, marked with small spots. All flippers are furred on both sides. Adult males are 59 to 79 inches long and weigh 154 to 374 pounds. Females are somewhat smaller at 47 to 49 inches long and 110 to 330 pounds in weight. They have ear openings, which they can close, but lack external ears. Harbor seals are strong swimmers using black flippers in a side to side motion and can leap completely out of the water or stay submerged 20 to 43 minutes. Metabolism slows to allow this. They are non-migratory and make only limited movements in connection with foraging and breeding. Enemies include sharks, killer whales, bears, walruses and, in the case of the young, eagles.

Range

The range of the harbor seal includes the coasts of the North Atlantic and North Pacific Oceans to Baja California and several inland lakes near Hudson Bay.

Habitat

Harbor seals inhabit riverbanks, beaches, offshore reefs, and rocky points.

Gestation

Gestation takes 10.5 to 11 months.

Litter

2

Behavior

The harbor seal is usually solitary, the only social cohesion being between the mother and her nursing pup. Adults and juveniles form strong linear hierarchies based on size and sex, adult males being dominant. Many individuals may gather at a favorite "hauling out" site for sleeping, birthing and resting.

Reproduction

Delayed implantation allows harbor seals to give birth and mate at the same time each year, despite a 9-month gestation period. Births vary by range, i.e., February for Baja, CA, and June to July for the North Pacific, Arctic North Atlantic and Europe. Single pups are usually 30-39 ins. long and weigh 22-26 lbs. The pup has adult pelage and can swim at birth. The mother is solicitous and will take the pup in her mouth and dive if there is danger. Lactation lasts 3-6 weeks, after which the pup is abandoned. Sexual maturity for males is reached between the ages of 3-6 yrs. and for females between 2-5 yrs.

Wild Diet

Mature: Fish, squid, octopus; shrimp, crab and crustaceans